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ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-5

Sprague Cuts Unit Budget 50%

Responds to Hill Critics of Slayings Panel Spending

By Jeremiah O'Leary

Washington Star Staff Writer

Chief Counsel Richard A. Sprague of the House assassinations committee has cut in half the \$6.5 million budget he once said was the minimum figure for the first year of the committee's probes of the murders of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Sources within the Select Committee on Assassinations said yesterday Sprague and his advisers have trimmed the estimated cost to about \$3 million in response to outspoken criticism on Capitol Hill about the high price tag the staff director originally put on the investigation.

The budget retrenchment by Sprague was seen by some connected with the controversial committee as an effort to persuade the House to extend the authorization for the committee beyond its present terminal date of March 31.

If Sprague makes public his reduced cost estimate when the committee meets again, probably next week, its chances of surviving the present power struggle between the chief counsel and Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Tex., would improve.

GOZALEZ WAS to confront Sprague and the 11 other members of the panel who support Sprague against Gonzalez earlier this week. But the expected collision was averted when Gonzalez was taken ill with flu in his San Antonio, Tex., home where he is expected to spend the rest of the week recuperating.

Gonzalez tried to fire Sprague two weeks ago and denounced the Philadelphia lawyer for being

insubordinate, inefficient and deceitful. But the rest of the committee united behind Sprague and the Kennedy-King investigations have been in limbo ever since.

But it is now reported that Sprague is by himself carrying out some of the changes that had aroused opposition to the chief counsel's plans and budget.

The committee staff would make no comment but it is probable that the new budget proposal carries with it a major staff reduction from the 173 jobs Sprague had once argued were indispensable. There are currently 73 investigators, lawyers and other employees on the committee staff.

Whether Sprague's economy moves will reconcile him with Gonzalez is problematical. The committee already has ruled out original ideas of Sprague's to use hidden transmitters, stress evaluators and polygraphs during the investigations.

SPEAKER Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. has met with Gonzalez' principal opponents on the committee already and still plans to meet with Gonzalez over the acrimonious situation within the panel. But essentially the speaker has washed his hands of the internal battle and has declared it is a question for the committee to work out itself.

Many House members were astounded when Sprague proposed \$6.5 million for the first year and indicated about the same amount for the second year of operations. The committee approved the \$6.5 million request but House members noted that this was far more than was expended on the Nixon impeachment proceeding. In the end, the House only extended the committee's life until March 31 and limited spending to \$84,000 a month.

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-2

Senate Unanimously Okays Turner as Director of CIA

United Press International

The Senate has unanimously confirmed Adm. Stansfield Turner as CIA director.

Turner, 53, President Carter's classmate at the Naval Academy, won approval by voice vote yesterday. He declared during his confirmation hearing Tuesday that he would resign his post if ever given a presidential order he felt was illegal or immoral.

Turner was Carter's second nominee. His first, former Kennedy aide Theodore Sorensen, withdrew from consideration when strenuous opposition developed in the Senate over the allegations he used classified White House material to write a book about the Kennedy years.

Turner will serve not only as head of the CIA, but also as the President's top coordinator of the diverse branches of the intelligence community. The second spot, director of central intelligence, was created by the Ford administration.